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STATE FOR NEA/ARP (DBERNS), NEA/PPD (CWHITTLESEY, DBENZE)

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SUBJECT: AMERICAN COACHES SHOOT HOOPS WITH YOUNG KUWAITIS DURING
OPERATION HARDWOOD II

REF: 05 KUWAIT 4127

¶1. Summary: Twelve NCAA basketball coaches conducted a basketball clinic for 40 Kuwaiti boys and a separate clinic for 17 Kuwaiti coaches on May 25, 2006, as part of the Embassy's highly successful outreach program targeting Kuwaiti youth through sports programming.

Embassy Public Affairs coordinated the visit with the Public Affairs Office at the Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) at Camp Arifjan. Kuwaiti press universally published positive reports on the clinics, which also were covered by FOX Sports. End Summary.

Engaging Kuwaiti Youths through Hoops

¶2. On Thursday, May 25, 2006, Kuwait Public Affairs arranged for 12 NCAA Basketball coaches participating in "Operation Hardwood II" to offer a boys basketball clinic and coaches' clinic at the Al-Kuwait Sports Club in downtown Kuwait. "Operation Hardwood II" is a USO program which arranged for NCAA coaches to coach American servicemen in Kuwait during a basketball tournament at Camp Arifjan during the last week of May 2006.

¶3. The Al-Kuwait Club's basketball stadium was packed with 40 Kuwait players aged 12 to 14 from three Kuwaiti sports clubs, downtown's Al-Kuwait and Al-Arabi clubs and the Al-Sahel Club from Kuwait's periphery. Dressed in their club's jerseys or NBA jerseys, the players were thrilled to be trained by these top-notch American coaches. Each player visited one of six stations for five minutes, where two of the NCAA coaches conducted shooting, dribbling, defense and other drills.

Legendary Coaches Bond with Kuwaiti Boys

¶4. The Ambassador observed the clinic, met the young Kuwaiti players and thanked the American coaches for coming to downtown Kuwait to conduct the sporting event. The participating coaches were: Rick Barnes (Texas), Jay Bilas (ESPN, former Duke player), Jim Crews (West Point), Mark Gottfried (Alabama), Tom Izzo (Michigan State), Billy Lange (Naval Academy), Bobby Lutz (UNC-Charlotte), Reggie Menton (Air Force Academy), Dave Odom (South Carolina), Kelvin Sampson (Indiana), Tubby Smith (Kentucky), and Gary Williams (Maryland). FOX Sports reporter Leeann Tweeden recorded the clinic for future airing on "Best Damn Sport Show Period." Additionally, coaches Odom and Lange held a clinic for 17 Kuwaiti basketball coaches. Participating coaches received Embassy certificates and players eagerly donned t-shirts they received featuring the American and Kuwaiti flags.

Media Coverage

¶5. The boys and coaches clinics received significant upbeat press coverage. In addition to covering the event, FOX Sports taped a quote from the Ambassador on the importance of engaging young

Kuwaitis through sports for airing on their sports talk show, "Best Damn Sports Show Period." Press coverage details follow:

05/25/06

--Kuwait Times, pg. 6, 1/8 page, 1 photo, circ. 35,000, English

05/26,

--Al-Qabas, pg. 40, 1/4 pg., 2 photos, circ. 65,000, Arabic

--Al-Seyassah, pg. 43, 1/8 pg., 1 photo, circ. 45,000, Arabic

--An-Anbaa, pg. 29, 1/4 pg., 3 photos, circ. 40,000, Arabic

--Kuwait Times, pg. 31, 1/8 page, 2 photos, 35,000, English

Reaching Young Kuwaitis via Sports

16. Comment: Sports outreach is as an outstanding vehicle with which to reach non-elite youth audiences. More opportunities for engaging young Kuwaiti boys and girls through sports and contact with American athletes would be most welcomed. Sports are seen as transcending nationality and culture by stressing common values: personal development, hard work, honest competition, and teamwork. Kuwait Public Affairs has had multiple successes in building bridges with young male and female Kuwaitis through sports, thus far with a stress on basketball. The May 25 clinic was the second arranged by Kuwait Public Affairs, the first having taken place August 30, 2005 (see reftel). A women's game between Club Al-Fatat and American servicewomen stationed at Camp Arifjan was held on April 27, 2006 (septel). Photos of recent sports events can be found on the Embassy's public website at: <http://kuwait.usembassy.gov>. End comment.

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